

# SUN & SPOON

BY

KEVIN HENKES



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artifact to preserve his memories of her.

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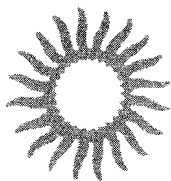
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FOR LAURA, WILL, AND SUSAN



# C O N T E N T S

PART ONE  
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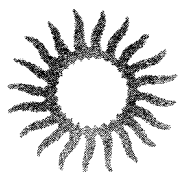
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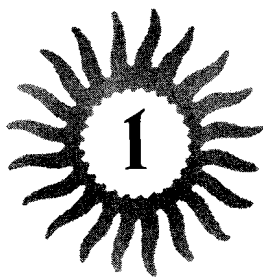
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P A R T O N E

# The Search







SPOON GILMORE'S GRANDMOTHER had been dead for two months when he realized that he wanted something special of hers to keep. This thought came to him in the middle of a hot, sticky July night and nagged at him off and on until morning.

It was all he could think about at breakfast. He was sitting alone at the kitchen table having the same breakfast he had almost every morning—a bowl of Cap'n Crunch and a glass of grape juice. His hand wobbled and his juice glass grazed his cheek, nearly missing his mouth, he was so preoccupied.



Juice dribbled down his chin. He wiped the juice with the back of his hand, then wiped his hand on his T-shirt.

Something of Gram's. Spoon had been dreaming about her since her death. Not frightening dreams. But dreams in which she would pass through a room quickly, or be sitting in a chair in a shadowy corner, watching. At first, the dreams were constant, every night, but they were growing less frequent. Spoon was afraid of losing what little was left of her—his memories. He was afraid of forgetting her. That's why he wanted something of hers.

He didn't know exactly what he had in mind, but he knew what he *didn't* have in mind: a photograph. Spoon disliked photographs of himself and he assumed that that's the way it was with most people. It surely had been the case with Gram, who, upon seeing a photo of herself, would sniff, disgusted, and brush it aside. A photograph

of Gram would not work. A photograph definitely was not what he was looking for. He needed something of Gram's that had been important to her. And he didn't want the "something" to be a girl thing like a necklace or a pin or an earring.

What could it be?

Sunlight shone through the large kitchen window, turning the tabletop white. Out the window Spoon could see his parents already at work in the garden. His father, Scott, was a fourth-grade teacher and his mother, Kay, taught art at the same school, Lincoln Elementary, to all the grades, kindergarten through fifth. Because they both had the summers free, they had become devoted gardeners over the years. Scott was most interested in vegetables and his compost bin, and Kay spent most of her time with her flowers. From dawn until dusk, day in and day out, all summer long, they could usually be found in the garden.

This particular summer was supposed to have been different, though. The entire family had planned to travel by car from their home in Madison, Wisconsin, to Eugene, Oregon, where Spoon's maternal grandmother, Evie, lived. They were going to take their time, stop along the way, see things that most people miss because of their hurried pace. But Spoon's other grandmother, the one who had lived in Madison just five blocks away, had died suddenly in May of a heart attack. Gram. Pa lived alone now in the house Spoon's father had grown up in.

"Mom and I can't leave Pa alone in Madison for the summer," Scott had told his three children early in June, glancing from one to the next to the next, then looking away and jingling the change in his pocket. Sadness showed in his eyes and in the droop of his shoulders. "Even if we'd cut the trip short . . . I can't do it. So the trip we planned is canceled. We'll try again next year. But Mom

and I talked with Evie. And she'll fly any or all of you out west if you want to go. For as long as you'd like. So think about it. . . ."

Joanie, who was six, couldn't bear to leave her mother.

Charlie, who was twelve, said yes instantly.

And Spoon, who was ten and in the middle, thought and thought and thought before finally saying no.

Charlie called him a baby. And maybe he was. But this was the first time someone he loved would be gone forever. He didn't like to think about the forever part. But when he did, which was often, the only place he wanted to be was home.

Evie's husband, Henry, had died long before Spoon was born, so Spoon only knew him through stories and photographs. He felt no real connection to Henry, but his connection to Gram was strong.

With his gaze fixed steadily on his bowl of Cap'n Crunch and his arms encircling it, Spoon sat as if in a trance, racking his brain for a solution. Something of Gram's. What could it be?

He sat and sat.

The cereal had become soggy. The milk in the bowl had turned a yellowy color, inedible. I've come up with nothing, Spoon thought, and I've wasted breakfast. He frowned at the bowl and pushed it away.

"I thought you *liked* Cap'n Crunch," said Joanie, popping up from behind the counter. She had the annoying habit of surprising Spoon, turning up when he least expected it. And this summer she was worse than ever.

He ignored her, rising from the table and placing his dishes in the sink.

"You can have some of my Floopies," she told him. That's what she called Froot Loops, the only cereal she would eat. "But

you can't read the box. You'll fill your head with too much stuff. And then you won't have room for other stuff."

Spoon turned toward her and shot her a look that said, You're crazy.

"Do you think we'll get a postcard from Charlie today?" Joanie asked in her high-pitched voice.

"Do I care?" He did. But he would never let on. He was still by the sink with his back to her, and he could feel her presence like a persistent itch. He decided to do the few dishes there were, hoping she'd be gone by the time he finished.

Joanie stood behind Spoon, waiting, clutching the handle of her little green-and-black plaid canvas suitcase. Despite the heat, she was wearing her red hooded sweatshirt with the hood up. Her head looked pointy like an elf's. The sweatshirt had first been Charlie's, then Spoon's, and now it belonged to Joanie. She loved it the way other children

love blankets or teddy bears. The cuffs were ragged, little holes had cropped up along the seams as if the stitches were rotting, and because it had been worn and laundered so many times it wasn't actually red any longer but the pale washy color of watermelon flesh.

"I can help you," Joanie offered, banging her suitcase against her knees.

"Nope. I'm almost done." His dishes were washed and rinsed and in the drying rack, but he continued to swish his hands about in the water for effect.

"Want to see what's in my suitcase?"

"I already know what's in your suitcase. Twigs."

"It's full of *bones*," Joanie said in a fierce whisper. "And I've got some new ones."

"They're twigs, not bones."

"They *are* bones. The bones of *trees*!" she shrieked. "And I collect them." She hopped with delight, a tiny hop.

Spoon spun around, drying his hands on

a dish towel. He gently tapped Joanie's head. "Just as I thought," he said. "Hollow."

As usual, Joanie just smiled at Spoon's insult, which always put him in a low mood. Charlie's insults could diminish Spoon, and he wondered why he didn't have the same power over Joanie.

"What are you going to do today?" Joanie asked.

"Whatever it is, you're not included," is what Spoon said, but he was smart enough to know that she would try to follow him no matter how hard he wished it to be otherwise. The privacy that he needed today would not be easy to come by. After tossing the dish towel on the table, Spoon set his jaw and looked at Joanie with narrow eyes, trying to send a message: *Do not tag along today.*

I've got to get moving, he thought. I've got to get something of Gram's. First, he'd ask permission from his parents to walk to



Pa's house, and then he'd be on his way.  
He headed for the back door.

"Where are you going?"

No response.

"Where are you going?"

No response.

Joanie slipped in front of her brother.  
"Where are you going?" she asked again,  
her voice musical, her blue eyes round. Her  
ability to wear him down was uncanny.

"I've got an important project to work  
on," Spoon replied under his breath in exas-  
peration. Instantly he was regretful. He  
hated himself for being such a big mouth,  
so he pinched his leg as hard as he could,  
imagining that it was Joanie he was pinching.

"Tell me, tell me!" Joanie jumped up and  
down, scraping the wall with her suitcase.

*"Where are you going?"*

Spoon was losing his temper. The wings  
of his nostrils flared and reddened. "Okay!"  
he shouted, giving in. "Okay! I'm going